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CC:
Subject: Associated Press (3-6) EPA's Dimock tests divisive

EPA's Dimock tests divisive

Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. and its supporters are at odds with the federal agency.

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM Associated Press

DIMOCK — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's testing of scores of water wells will give residents of this small Suquehanna County village a snapshot of the aquifer they rely on for drinking, cooking and bathing.

The first EPA test results, expected this week, are certain to provide fodder for both sides of a raging 3-year-old debate over unconventional natural gas drilling and its impacts on Dimock, a rural crossroads that starred in the Emmy Award-winning documentary "Gasland."

A handful of residents are suing Cabot Oil & Gas Corp., saying the Houston-based driller contaminated their wells with potentially explosive methane gas and with drilling chemicals. Many other residents of Dimock assert the water is clean, and that the plaintiffs are exaggerating problems with their wells to help their lawsuit.

In a letter to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, a pro-drilling group called Enough is Enough contends the agency's "rogue" Philadelphia field office has allowed itself to be a pawn of trial lawyers seeking a big payout from Cabot. More than 300 people signed it. "Dimock Proud" signs dot lawns throughout the village in Susquehanna County, one of the most intensively drilled regions of the Marcellus Shale gas field.

The same group recently launched a website aimed at dispelling what it contends is the myth that Dimock's aquifer is contaminated.

Residents who have been clamoring for federal intervention say the attacks on the EPA — which have come not only from their neighbors but from Cabot and Pennsylvania's environmental chief — are groundless.

"Since the EPA's investigation began, Cabot and (state regulators) have undertaken a shameless public campaign against the EPA's attempt to rescue the victims who are now without potable water and prevent their exposure to hazardous constituents now present in the aquifer," one of their lawyers, Tate Kunkle, wrote recently.

Cabot spokesman George Stark said the company opposed the EPA testing because it creates a false impression about Dimock.

“It’s the notion that there must be something wrong there in order for the EPA to either do testing or to deliver water. I think it causes more concern, more mistrust, more misinformation about the industry overall,” he said.

In addition to testing scores of water wells, the EPA is paying to deliver fresh water to four homes where the agency cited worrisome levels of manganese, sodium and cancer-causing arsenic.

Brian Oram, an independent geologist and water consultant from Northeastern Pennsylvania, said he is puzzled by the agency’s rationale for being in Dimock, since the substances that EPA said it’s most concerned about are naturally occurring and commonly found in the regional groundwater.

Nevertheless, Oram supports the EPA testing because it will provide water quality data the parties can trust, and against which future drilling can be measured.

Cabot asserts the high methane levels that its own testing has consistently found in the Dimock water wells are naturally occurring and easily remediated.

But state regulators have cited “overwhelming evidence,” including chemical fingerprinting, that linked the methane in Dimock’s water supply to improperly cemented gas wells drilled by Cabot.

Read more: [http://www.timesleader.com/news/EPA rsquo s Dimock tests divisive 03-06-2012.html#ixzz1oL4OA2Kd](http://www.timesleader.com/news/EPA_rsquo_s_Dimock_tests_divisive_03-06-2012.html#ixzz1oL4OA2Kd)

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